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SUBJECT: THE PILLARS OF OFFICIAL ISLAM IN JORDAN

REF: AMMAN 1329

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary  
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11. (C) Official Islam in Jordan -- or government-sanctioned and -controlled Islamic institutions -- consists of three main pillars that run the Islamic affairs of the state: 1) the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Sites; 2) the Department of the Supreme Justice; and 3) the National Fatwa Committee. Close coordination between these entities and other key organizations, including the Ministry of Education and the Military's religion department, ensure that the official Jordanian line on moderate Islam, as enshrined in the Amman Message, is propagated within Jordanian society (reftel).

Official Islam in Jordan  
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12. (C) Official Islam in Jordan -- that is, the government-sanctioned and -controlled Islamic institutions -- largely consists of three main pillars that run the Islamic religious affairs of the state: 1) the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Sites; 2) the Department of the Supreme Justice; and 3) the National Fatwa Committee. Each of these distinct institutions has its unique turf, and serves in many ways as a system of checks-and-balances to ensure that no one person gains undue influence over the content and practice of official Islam in Jordan. Additional key institutions related to official Islam in Jordan include the Mufti of the Jordanian Armed Forces, the Ministry of Education, and the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (reftel).

The Awqaf Ministry  
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13. (C) The Awqaf Ministry, headed by Minister Abdul Fattah Salah, is responsible for the upkeep of mosques, holy sites and shrines, and plays the key role of appointing and paying imams (prayer leaders), khateeb (those who deliver Friday sermons), and mosque caretakers. These roles are closely controlled by the Ministry, and preachers without licenses can be fined. Imams and khateeb are civil servants on the state payroll.

14. (C) Farouk Jarrar, Acting Director of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, told Poloff that Friday sermons are not censored or overtly controlled or scripted by the Ministry, because the Ministry-appointed imams and khateeb would not be licensed if they were propagating extremist thought or topics outside the bounds of traditional Sunni Islam in Jordan. Without specifying how, he also noted that the Ministry has a good handle on what is being said in the Mosques.

15. (C) The Ministry also looks after the affairs of the abundant Awqaf (Islamic religious endowments) in Jordan, and manages Jordan's custodianship over Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem. The Ministry is charged with preserving Jordan's Islamic heritage and teaching Islam to Mosque congregants at mosques through Qur'anic schools. It also publishes Islamic texts and Qur'ans, and manages the important affairs of Hajj and Umra pilgrimage to Mecca. Note: Because of strict Saudi limits and quotas on pilgrimage to Mecca, the Ministry has an important role to play in deciding which Jordanians will receive one of the valuable spots to go to Mecca. End note. The Ministry also takes part in overseeing the official Zakat Fund that collects and distributes Zakat (obligatory Islamic alms) in the country.

16. (C) As the Ministry governs the functioning of the mosques, it is also responsible for the system of the call to prayer, the Adhan. In Amman, the Adhan is conducted not by the voice of muezzins (those who call to prayer), but by a synchronized radio broadcast throughout the city. The Adhan recitation and times are uniform and transmitted via radio to each mosque's p.a. system. The transmission is broadcast via Amman's Islamic radio station.

17. (C) In an interesting addition to the traditional Adhan, the Jordanian Adhan is followed by salutations to the Prophet Muhammad and his family. While this was a traditional practice in some Muslim countries in the past, it is rare today, and interlocutors have remarked that it is a new practice in Amman. Some interlocutors have speculated that the Jordanian religious leaders are not only wishing blessings on the Prophet, but also wishing good tidings on,

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and thereby augmenting support and amplifying religious legitimacy for the King - as a Hashemite, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Qadi al-Qudah  
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18. (SBU) The Department of the Supreme Justice (Qadi al-Qudah) reports to the Prime Ministry, and runs the Shari'a courts of Jordan, which operate in parallel with the civil and special (including security) court systems. The current Supreme Justice is Dr. Ahmad Hlayyel, who also serves as the Imam of the Royal Hashemite Family. The Shari'a courts deal with matters involving personal law such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. This system applies to Muslim Jordanians. The Supreme Justice also adjudicates moon-sightings, necessary for determining the start of Islamic holidays and festivals.

19. (C) Hlayyel told Poloff that his department bases its rulings primarily on Hanafi jurisprudence, as the Hanafi school of Islamic law is generally considered to be more flexible in regards to transactions and personal law than the other three main Sunni schools of Islamic law. While transactions are conducted under Hanafi jurisprudence, others interlocutors have told Poloff that acts of worship are conducted under Shafi'i interpretations of Islamic law as they are considered to be easier than Hanafi rules of worship.

The Fatwa Committee  
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10. (SBU) In September 2006, Jordan created a National Fatwa Committee intended to organize fatwas and the fatwa-issuing process, and, according to Justice Minister at the time Adeb Shakhaneh, to put an end to confusing and random fatwas. The committee is headed by a Grand Mufti, currently Dr. Nuh Al-Qudah. And as its name suggests, it is responsible for issuing religious edicts through a financially and politically autonomous committee made up of religious scholars and members from the government, Armed Forces and

¶11. (SBU) The other Jordanian institutions that have a significant impact on the religious life of average Muslims in Jordan include the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) and the Ministry of Education.

¶12. (C) The JAF has a department of Morality and Guidance, equivalent to the U.S. military chaplaincy. The department is led by Brig. Gen. Abdalkarim al-Khasawneh, who holds the title of Mufti of the Jordanian Armed Forces and Counselor to the Royal Jordanian Air Force. The military imams serve their service members by providing religious guidance, leading prayers, and delivering Friday sermons. Most of the military imams dress in the traditional style of Islamic clerics in Jordan (a fez wrapped in a white cloth, a style prevalent in most Ottoman-influenced countries - although some choose the Saudi head-dress style) and with a traditional long cloak, but in military green. They ensure that the military is firmly in line with Amman Message thinking and that extreme Islamic thought cannot infiltrate the military ranks.

¶13. (C) Another key player in Islam in Jordan is the educational system and the Ministry of Education that oversees it. While the Awqaf Ministry appoints and pays imams at the mosques, the Ministry of Education hires Islamic education teachers for the state school system. The Awqaf Ministry only hires college graduates from Shari'a or Islamic-related fields, whereas the Education Ministry can hire any Arabic graduates to teach religious classes. In both ministries, the hiring takes place through the Civil Service Bureau, which is responsible for the hiring of all civil servants.

¶14. (C) The textbooks used by the Ministry of Education are produced by a committee of Islamic thinkers and Ministry of Education officials. Dr. Abdul-Salam Al-Abbadi, former President of Aal al-Bayt University in Jordan, who became Secretary General of the Jeddah-based International Islamic Fiqh Academy in March 2008, was a member of a recent such committee. Abbadi told Poloff that the textbooks are reviewed periodically to ensure that potentially insensitive content is removed. He noted that the principles of the Amman Message, while nothing new to traditional Islam, were purposefully included in the textbooks currently in use in Jordan, and that other countries ) he mentioned &Qatar and

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others8 - were considering including Amman Message principles (though perhaps without the &Amman8 label) in their textbooks.

#### Unofficial Islamic Organizations -----

¶15. (C) Aal al-Bayt Institute Director Jarrar confirmed to Poloff that there are other "non-official8 Islamic institutions in Jordan, with some dynamic imams or preachers having their own following. That said, he expressed confidence that the relations between those leaders and the official institutions are good, and that the official Islamic institutions had a good grasp of what was going on in the country in terms of religious thought and practice. He noted that the influence of Sufism in Jordan was not great, certainly much less than in Egypt or Syria, but that there were active Sufi groups. Note: Sufism is often described as a mystical offshoot of Islam. Sufism in Jordan is more of a branch of traditional Sunni Islam whose followers join spiritual brotherhood groups usually led by scholars able to assemble a following. The goals of the adherents tend to be focused on increasing their religious awareness through increased study or group worship, in addition to the regular prayers done by most practicing Muslims. End note.

¶16. (C) While the official Islamic institutions in Jordan are based on Hanafi and Shafi,i Sunni Islam, there is also a Salafi presence in Jordan. While there are extremist branches of Salafism in Jordan that do not adhere to the government,s line on Islam, most Salafis follow the government approach. There are Salafi preachers who are employed by the Awqaf Ministry. There are also independent Salafi research institutions such as the Albani Center (named after a famous Albanian-born Salafi Sheikh Muhammad al-Albani). One particularly well-known Salafi Sheikh/Imam is Dr. Muhammad Musa Nasr, who is the imam and khateeb of a mosque near the Embassy. While a conservative cleric, he nonetheless preaches the essence of the Amman Message, and uses his Friday sermons to use Islamic references to discredit violent extremism. All of his Friday sermons include supplications for good fortune for the King, and for security and prosperity for the country.

Comment

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¶17. (C) The three key pillars of official Islam in Jordan seem to be on the same page with regard to the Amman Message and the leadership,s push to propagate moderate and authentic Islam. It is important to note that all of the leaders of the key institutions of official Islam in Jordan - the Awqaf Minister, Grand Mufti, Military Mufti, and Minister of Education - are board members of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute of Islamic Thought along with Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad, the King,s Advisor and Chairman of the Aal al-Bayt Board (reftel). Such robust coordination among these pillars of official Islam, and their functions in the country, provide a solid foundation for Jordan to continue to promote Islamic moderation within its society with the aim of preventing any domestic spread of extremist ideology. At the same time, Jordan has the institutional experience and success to continue to try to export the themes of the Amman Message and Amman Interfaith Message to influence other Muslim and non-Muslim societies positively.

Visit Amman's Classified Web Site at  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman/>  
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